Extending Your Network to the Neighborhood

A two-node family setup is a solid start. Adding even one or two neighbors with nodes transforms a household link into a neighborhood communications network — more range, more redundancy, more shared situational awareness.

Why the Neighborhood Unit Matters

In a significant disaster, the household is rarely the right unit for coordination. Knowing that the road south is blocked, that a neighbor needs help, or that the water is safe to drink is the kind of local intelligence that neither cell broadcasts nor emergency radio provides for hours or days after an event. Mesh fills that gap at the neighborhood level. Keep in mind that mesh is best-effort and supplemental — it is not a replacement for 911 or official alerts.

The Impact of One Elevated Node

A single node at elevation — a rooftop, a tall fence post, a second-story window — dramatically expands coverage:

- A well-sited rooftop node can reach a mile or more in favorable line-of-sight conditions, sometimes much farther, but real range varies widely with terrain, antenna, and obstructions — handheld-to-rooftop links in built-up suburbs are often well under a mile. Test in your own area rather than assuming a fixed figure.
- In Meshtastic, an ordinary powered node generally helps relay for others by default. In MeshCore this is **not** true — ordinary powered client nodes do not relay for others; only dedicated repeater nodes (or a Companion with Off-Grid/Client Repeat explicitly enabled) forward traffic. Check which firmware your neighborhood is running before assuming any node extends coverage.
- A properly sized solar node on a sunny roof can run for long periods unattended, but not "indefinitely with no maintenance" — reliability depends on panel and battery sizing, season and weather, and batteries age and occasionally need service.

If you can get one household in your immediate area to permanently host an elevated repeater node, everyone with a device in range benefits.

Starting a Neighborhood Mesh Group

This doesn't require a formal organization — just a few neighbors with nodes and a shared channel. A practical starting approach:

1. **Find two or three interested neighbors.** A neighborhood Nextdoor post, HOA meeting, or block party conversation is enough. Frame it as "emergency preparedness" — most people respond positively.
2. **Set up a shared neighborhood channel** with a simple name (your street name, neighborhood name) and distribute the key in person. This channel is separate from your private family channel.
3. **Agree on basic channel norms:** What goes on the neighborhood channel? Keep it focused — infrastructure status, road conditions, resource sharing (generator fuel, water), wellness checks. Not general chat.
4. **Map your coverage.** Have each household send a test message and note who receives it directly. Gaps in coverage reveal where an elevated or repeater node would help most.

Connecting to Broader Networks

Your neighborhood mesh doesn't operate in isolation during a major event:

- **The public channel** (default unencrypted channel) is your interface to the wider community mesh. Monitor it for situational awareness from people and groups you haven't coordinated with in advance.
- **ARES/RACES operators** in your area may deploy mesh nodes as part of organized emergency communications. These mesh nodes operate under Part 15 on the 915 MHz ISM band, the same as yours. If those operators bridge traffic to amateur radio, that leg requires a licensed operator and plaintext (no encryption) per 47 CFR 97.113(a)(4) — the 915 MHz mesh itself is not amateur radio.
- **Mesh America community nodes** in your area operate as always-on repeaters. Check the coverage map to see if your neighborhood is within range — if so, and if your device uses the same regional preset/frequency and channel, your handhelds can connect through them.
- **Keep channels separated by purpose:** private family channel for family, neighborhood channel for local coordination, public channel for broader awareness. Don't mix them.

Next Steps

- Set up your first family nodes
- Build a go-bag node kit for field deployment
- Connect with ARES/RACES operators in your area
- Detailed neighborhood network planning guide

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